

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS *in California*

United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service Davis, California



Focus on the Coast
What's New in Area 2?
See Page 4

**Exceptional
Watershed Efforts
Celebrated at Honor
Awards Ceremonies in
Washington, DC**

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**Watershed Group
Receives Awards
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After a brief walk through, enthusiastic Earth Team volunteers took over and ran the show at the Children's Drinking Water Festival in Irvine's Wild Rivers Park.

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Neem, the winning team at this year's California Envirothon, hails from Camarillo High School. The team will represent California in the National Envirothon, to be held from July 31 to August 6 in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

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Tom Lockhart, RCD Project Coordinator of Monterey County RCD during interview by TV News8.

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More than 100 visitors toured the Elk Grove Service Center during the grand opening on April 27.

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Questions, comments, and contributions may be forwarded to:
Current Developments
NRCS Office of Public Affairs
430 G Street #4164, Davis, California 95616.
Phone (530) 792-5644 or fax (530) 792-5791

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CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS STAFF

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Editor: Anita Brown

Layout/Design: Dave Sanden

Editorial Assistance: Dave Sanden

Photocopying: Jon Jay

A MESSAGE FROM JEFF

Gung Ho!

Maybe you've heard this expression recently. Maybe you've even seen the video or read the book by this title, co-authored by management guru,

Ken Blanchard. It's a simple notion, maybe deceptively simple, NRCS folks in California have been testing its truth and using the expression frequently lately.

Just to quickly recap the book's premise, it comes from a true story of **Peggy Sinclair**, a newly appointed plant manager of a failing facility. The one subsection of the plant that consistently proved productive was headed by an American Indian named **Andy Longclaw**. Andy taught Peggy some management lessons—taught to him by his grandfather, who in turn learned them from the animals: The Spirit of the Squirrel, The Way of the Beaver, and The Gift of the Goose. Collectively they embody the “Gung-Ho” spirit.

The short book elaborates on each of these principles, but simply captured they emphasize the following: Worthwhile work with shared values and goals (learned from the squirrels scampering around to store food); Each professional plotting their own path to accomplish those goals (the hard working beavers who all seem to understand the goals and independently strive to fulfill them); and a team spirit that cheers each member on through successes and challenges (the geese honking their encouragement to the lead bird of the moment).

While almost all work in our society could be viewed as worthwhile, we in NRCS seem to have a uniquely keen sense of mission and purpose in our work with landowners and natural resources. Each field office—with its own local needs and priorities, and miles from the next or the State Office—is beaver-like in plotting a course that fulfills our overall goals. And finally, we all need to cheer each other on.

A great big Gung Ho, not only from me, but also all the way from **Secretary Glickman**, goes to our Ukiah and Petaluma field offices, who along with three area RCDs are slowly but surely restoring the Russian River Watershed. In June they received a national USDA Honor Award—which was bestowed locally by Congressman **Mike Thompson**, and followed by a tour with Congresswoman **Lynn Woolsey** (see story).



More Gung-Ho appreciation goes out to our Monterey-area offices and RCDs working with Congressman **Sam Farr** on an ambitious effort to restore the Monterey Bay and surrounding uplands. Gung Ho too to all the many offices—and our partners in Cooperative Extension—who have worked so hard to protect our rangelands. Sometime this summer they will cumulatively reach the million-acre mark, placing a big chunk of our rangeland resource under conservation plans.

Our RC&Ds—existing, applied, and forming—also deserve to share in our Gung-Ho appreciation. There are two new RC&Ds with applications in Washington, and four more actively crystallizing as functioning RC&Ds.

Reina Rogers, Paul Benedict and conservationists in Area 4 have shown Gung-Ho perseverance. They are making excellent progress toward the daunting task of sharing our valuable technical know-how with the many Indian tribes who need it.

Dan Martyn, the folks in Colusa, and the engineers in the State Office also deserve a Gung Ho for their patience, perseverance and professionalism in finding a fish screen that will work for both the farmers and the fish who rely on the Sacramento River. As of July we are a step closer to finding functioning technology.

Congratulations to all California NRCS employees and partners. Thanks for your dedicated service.

Gung Ho!

Focus on the Coast

Events, Occurrences, and Adventures in Area II



Carter Christensen, ASTCFO Area II

A Message from Carter

The news articles on the following pages describe some of “what’s going on” in Area II. They, by no means, cover all the highlights and/or issues before us, but they give you a flavor of opportunities seized.

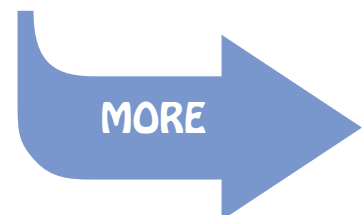
Stories in this issue include:

- Congressman Sam Farr at the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
- Natural photo shoot in Modesto, Petaluma, and Salinas
- Monterey County Range Water Quality Short Course
- Alameda County Palomar School and \$30,000 Check
- Santa Clara County Land Judging Contest
- NRCSpeed Team at the Big Sur Marathon
- Contra Costa-Alameda County Yellow Starthistle Workshop
- Santa Cruz-San Mateo County Equity Leadership Program

The field office staffs and their RCD partners make many good things happen, and the stories in this issue are just a few examples. The Area II workforce impresses me as the best I’ve ever seen at addressing a myriad of issues in a most complex area. Area II offices remain excited about working with RCDs and other partners, as we link arms to put more conservation on the ground than any of us can do alone.

For example, the Central Coast Cluster has embraced significant responsibility in the six-county Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary’s Action Plan for Agriculture & Rural Lands. This Action Plan involves NRCS, RCDs, and other federal, state, and local agencies, as well as public and private groups to address a range of water quality and watershed issues. U.S. Congressman **Sam Farr** has been a key supporter of this plan calling it a “*collaborative approach to managing our land and ocean that protects the sanctuary and sustains our region’s critical agricultural industry.*”

And the future looks bright for many more quality of life improving projects in the entire area; check us out in the next issue. With that, I hope that you enjoy reading samples of our successes.



They Wanted To See Strawberries

By Daniel Mountjoy, Resource Conservationist, Salinas Area Office

Monterey County is known for its hillside farming of strawberries. It is also known for its spectacular coastline. The combination of these attributes led **Colleen Schneider** (West Regional Communications Specialist) and **Anita Brown** (California's Director of Public Affairs) to select the area for a stop in a national photo shoot to get more western pictures into NRCS Private Lands national campaign and future publications. Past publicity for buffer strips and contoured plantings have always featured mid-western crops and farm landscapes. This project will expand the representation of Californian farming conditions.

California warmly welcomed renowned photographer and Iowa's Public Affairs Specialist **Lynn Betts**, and USDA Videographer **Kevin Conner** to capture agricultural images from Modesto, Petaluma, and Monterey Counties.

The two maintained a demanding week-long schedule to rise early and shoot in the rich glow of early morning and then late afternoon light prior to driving to their next destination to repeat the schedule. To obtain effective photo perspectives, they sometimes ventured up in an airplane or rose up over the landscape in a 40 to 60 foot aerial lift. The day they spent with me, **Jolene Lau** (Public Affairs Specialist), and **Jonathan Berkey** (RCD of Monterey County), we visited seven properties including wetlands, stream corridors, and strawberry and artichoke farms. Little did we know that we had an artichoke connoisseur



Jolene's view of the crew in a strawberry field from a 40-foot boom.



Strawberry fields forever! Photos taken from altitude captured some spectacular vistas.

among us who supports an expensive heart-a-day habit in Washington D.C. Hope you enjoyed the fried artichokes Kevin!

After a day in Monterey, the two headed to Modesto to capture photos of dairy nutrient management, irrigation, and more buffers. "**Mike and Arthur Crowell** of Bar Vee Dairy and Joe Mota, NRCS Soil Conservationist, did an excellent job providing interviews," stated **Michael McElhiney**, District Conservationist. "It was fun and illustrates the significant contributions to conservation in California."

After Modesto, the two met with District Conservationist **Charlette Sanders** who led the photo crew to Marin and Sonoma County. Marin County RCD director Sally Gale of Gale Livestock Ranch shared her enthusiasm for riparian restoration and agtourism during her interview. "She has the most beautifully restored historic ranch houses that she uses as a Bed & Breakfast," stated Sanders.

The photos will be used in national publications but also add to our State and local photo collections, providing unique perspectives on wetland buffers, WHIP plantings, EQIP stream bank stabilizations, and furrow alignment techniques. I have already received slides from their trip in Monterey and look forward to using these professional visual products. Thanks for your effort guys, great job!

Thanks also to our field folks in Colusa County who helped the photographers capture wetland images of the Sacramento Valley—Ed.

Lights, Camera, Action!

By Jolene Lau, Public Affairs Specialist, Salinas Area Office

What was supposed to be a rainy day in Salinas turned out to be one of the best NRCS/RCD media events that I've seen since arriving in the Salinas Area Office. Farmers, TV crews, newspaper reporters, lots of honorary guests, and a Congressman makes for a new Public Affairs Specialist's dream.

The event was held in January to celebrate the completion of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Agriculture and Rural Lands Plan. It began with a small gathering of about 30 invited guests hopping on a tour bus at the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas for a ride into Chualar Canyon.

The first stop was NRCS/RCD cooperator **Butch Lindley's** property, highlighting the use of cover crops on his vineyard and a sediment trap/removal system. Next, the tour bus stopped at the property of **Robert Johnson**, who has an Environmental Quality Incentives Program plan, and then continued on to the organic farm of NRCS/RCD cooperators **Israel Morales** and **Bob Martin**.



U.S. Congressman Sam Farr points to Monterey Bay in his speech supporting the efforts for water quality.

The tour was followed by a reception at the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas where guest speakers shared their support for the partners involved in implementing the plan. Among the speakers were U.S. Congressman **Sam Farr** (17th District); **David Festa** for U.S. Department of Commerce Secretary **William Daley**; NRCS State Conservationist **Jeff Vonk**;

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Superintendent **William Douros**; California Farm Bureau Federation's **Carolyn Richardson**; and Sanctuary Agricultural Representative **Richard Nutter**.

"This type of collaborative approach to managing our land and ocean protects the sanctuary and sustains our region's critical agricultural industry," said Farr during the reception.

Reporters from Television News8 and News46 attended the tour and aired the interviews during the evening news. Articles appeared in *The Monterey County Herald*, *The Californian*, *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, *Register Pajaronian*, *Modesto Bee*, *Ag Alert*, *Free Lance*, and *NRCS This Week*. For more information, please call **Albert Cerna** at the Salinas Service Center or **Daniel Mountjoy** at the Salinas Area Office.

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Agriculture and Rural Lands Plan

The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary's Agriculture and Rural Lands Plan is designed to enhance and protect the physical, chemical, and biological conditions in the Sanctuary and its adjacent watersheds. Currently, 27 federal, state and local agencies, as well as public and private groups are working together with cities, harbors, businesses, and the agricultural community to address a range of water quality and watershed issues.

Initial development of the plan began in 1996 with suggestions from workshop participants to address water quality issues and strategies. Some of the strategies that NRCS and/or Resource Conservation Districts are helping with include:

- Establishing regional industry networks as a framework for addressing nonpoint source management;
- Identifying priority sites for joint projects;
- Implementing nonpoint source management practices using industry-led local watershed working groups;
- Compiling/distributing technical information on agricultural conservation practices;
- Strengthening the referral network and cross training for technical field staff;
- Increasing public knowledge of and support for agriculture and agricultural conservation measures; and
- Increasing grower and public awareness of watershed-based management.

And the Winners Are...

By Bruce Eisenman, District Conservationist, Hollister Service Center

Eager high school students from Campbell, Morgan Hill and Gilroy High, participated in the recent annual Santa Clara Valley land judging contest and took home ribbons and monetary awards.

The land judging contest is a partnership effort between the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Loma Prieta and Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation Districts. The RCDs sponsor the contest and NRCS provides technical support.

The students had four soil pits to judge. Three pits were on irrigated farmland and one was in a shallow soil on a serpentine range site. At one of the pits students had to evaluate the effects of a high water table and flood prone area on farming and land use.

NRCS representatives included myself, Hollister Construction Inspector **Bruce Champion**, Hollister Soil Survey Party Leader **Bry Schmidt**, Hollister Ag Engineer **Lloyd Replogle**, Salinas Construction Inspector **Bob Donleavy**, and Salinas Public Affairs Specialist **Jolene Lau**. District partners included **Patty Marfia**, of Loma Prieta RCD, **Nancy Bernardi**, of Guadalupe-Coyote RCD, and **Tom Lockhart**, of Monterey County RCD.



Shown right, students take soil samples in this pit as part of the land judging contest.



Soil Scientist Bry Schmidt (front left standing in pit) and Bob Kunts, Gilroy High ag instructor led the students in soils discussion before the contest.

Bry and I started the contest with a quick class about soils and information on the various elements of the test at a sample soil pit. Bruce C., Lloyd, Bob, and Tom were stationed at various soil pits to answer questions and oversee the students taking the test. Volunteers under the supervision of Patty did contest scoring. Nancy arranged to have plenty of food and drinks for all participants. Jolene took photos.

Congratulations to all the students for a job well done and special recognition to **Erik Agerbeek** who took

third place, **Lisa Krenzle** who took second, and **Jennifer Taggart** who won first place in the land judging contest. Thank you to all those who helped with this successful event.



Tom Lockhart (back) and Bruce Eisenman (front) show a student how to determine a slope.

On Your Marks, Get Set, Go!

By Jolene Lau, Public Affairs Specialist, Salinas Area Office

The runners are at it again—the Big Sur International Marathon that is. The elite team, “*NRCSpeed*” consisting of NRCS men from Area II, placed third this year in the Men’s Master Division (male runners over the age of 40).

Rich Casale (District Conservationist, Capitola Field Office), **Bruce Eisenman** (District Conservationist, Hollister Field Office), **Daniel Mountjoy** (Resource Conservationist, Salinas Area Office), and **Douglas Toews** (Area Engineer, Santa Maria Field Office) were led by team captain **Albert Cerna** (District Conservationist, Salinas Field Office) for the 26.2 mile relay.



Photo by Gwen Gilbert

Said to be the most beautiful scenic run in the United States, the Big Sur International Marathon follows the coast from Big Sur to Carmel. Not only was there an awe-inspiring ocean view, but various classical musicians entertained runners at different spots along the course.

Cerna, starting with four miles for the first leg, passed the baton to Casale for the 5.8 miles in the second leg, who handed it over to Eisenman for the 6.9-mile third leg, which had two miles of about a 7 percent incline. Mountjoy picked up the 5.5-mile fourth leg, and Toews finished the four-mile fifth leg with a recently injured knee. They each received an elegant laser-engraved plaque and picturesque poster of marathoners along the Pacific Coast.

In the Men’s Master Division, the first-place team came in at two hours and 58 minutes while the second place team made it at three hours and 16 minutes. *NRCSpeed* was not far behind placing third with a record time of three hours, 23 minutes, and 15 seconds—averaging 7 minutes and 44 seconds per mile. There were 230 relay teams overall in the marathon, ranging in age and ability. *NRCSpeed* placed 26th overall.

The well-fit team has been running for years on their own. When asked what training was like prior to the race, a few team members said that they ran six to 12

miles three times a week with weights. Mountjoy mentioned that training uphill helped him to make his fastest time ever. Casale also jogged a mile to warm up before the race. Eisenman and Mountjoy have been running since high school and Casale has been running for nearly 25 years. Toews has run five full marathons since 1993.

As the team captain, Cerna initiated the idea of competing in the relay and made sure that the registration packet was submitted on time. “He even showed up at 3:30 a.m. to make sure everything was set to go and thought he was in the wrong place because no

one else was there yet,” chuckled Casale. Two months before the race, Cerna suggested that the team wear red shirts to make it easier to find each other when handing over the wrist band. Unfortunately, Eisenman did not easily recognize Casale who removed his shirt due to the heat but the team still made excellent time!

The last time NRCSers competed in this marathon there were two different teams. In 1996, “*NRCSpeed*” consisted of the above listed men except that instead of Daniel, **Bill Gradle** was part of the team. “*Resource Racers*” consisted of **Tom Schott**, **Jennifer Goldstein**, **Dan Toan**, **Daniel Mountjoy**, and **Jennifer Gerstenberg**.

The team has discussed competing in other races to help train for next year’s marathon. There is one coming up in July in San Francisco and another one in Silicon Valley. The 2001 Big Sur Marathon has been rated as “difficult” and rumor has it that it will be tougher next year with an estimated 6.55 miles per leg with four legs instead of five. *NRCSpeed* invites other NRCS teams to join this exciting opportunity. “I’m sure we will get challengers this time after it comes out in *Current Developments*.”

Congratulations again to members of *NRCSpeed*!

Local School Welcomes Project

By

Terry Huff, District Conservationist, Livermore Local Partnership Office

Either that's a very large check or the kids are really, really small...

NRCS, Alameda County RCD, legislative representatives, media, and about 70 elementary school children and staff took this photo opportunity when accepting a check for \$30,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Pacific Gas & Electric Company. Following the ceremony, Alameda County Supervisor **Mary King** and legislative aides for U.S. Congresswoman **Ellen Tauscher**, State Assemblywoman **Ellen Corbett**, and State Senator **Liz Figueroa**, participated with other guests on a tour along Palomares Creek. The event was aired on the Bay Area Channel 7 News.



improved wildlife habitat, and a community of aware and involved watershed stewards.

The grant will be used towards the development of the Palomares School Environmental Learning Center. This Center, part of a regional learning program, will include bioengineered riparian restoration, trail improvement, environmental education, and community outreach. The long-term goal of the project is to develop a model watershed with cleaner water,

Project partners providing financial and/or in-kind support include; Palomares Elementary School, Castro Valley School District, Alameda County Public Works Agency, Alameda County Resource Conservation District, USDA NRCS, UC Cooperative Extension, CA Regional Water Quality Control Board, US EPA, PG&E, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Water Quality Short Course Held.....

By Danny Marquis, Resource Conservationist, King City Local Partnership Office

Why is ranch water quality important in Monterey County? Perhaps it's because of the numerous cattle ranches on hill tops that contribute to nutrient levels in neighboring farms and communities. It's important enough that the UC Cooperative Extension and NRCS recently sponsored a three-day short course to increase awareness of the issue.

It all began with discussion on how grazing affects water quality, how to identify water quality problems, and how to fix those problems. During the session, participants completed a water quality assessment of their ranch, developed a draft conservation plan, and designed an individual monitoring program. Upon completion of the short course, participants receive a certificate documenting their training.

Funding came from NRCS EQIP Education Grants. This statewide voluntary program is also supported by California Cattleman's Association, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts, California Woolgrowers Association, California Farm Bureau Federation, the State Water Resources Control Board, and the Regional Water Quality Control Boards.

Weed Workshop Draws a Crowd

By Larry Soenen, District Conservationist, Concord Service Center

As part of an EQIP Education grant, a public workshop was held in May on yellow starthistle for community members in Contra Costa and Alameda Counties. More than 140 ranchers, farmers, landowners, and other interested individuals turned out for the one-day workshop and tour.

Speakers from the University of California-Davis and California's Department of Food & Agriculture discussed the biology of the plant, control efforts, and effects of yellow starthistle on annual grassland. Our own **Dave Dyer** from the Plant Materials Center did a presentation on test results on yellow starthistle displacement and competition by overseeding. A Yolo County grower also shared his experiences in cost/benefit and the use of the herbicide Transline.

Following a tri-tip BBQ lunch provided by the Contra Costa-Alameda Cattleman's Association, participants were shuttled to view 20 test plots within the Briones Regional Park in Berkeley. Each of the 60' x 60' plots displayed a variety of control measures from grazing, burning, chemical, biological, and combinations. The overall message: With patience, persistence, and timely use of multiple control measures, this weed can be handled.

The Contra Costa RCD videotaped parts of the workshop to document speaker presentations and test plot examples. As part of the EQIP Education grant, the footage will be used in an instructional video on yellow starthistle. Contra Costa Public Television also covered the workshop and will broadcast the information on public cable.

Contra Costa Ag Commissioner **Ed Meyer** showed his support by sending out workshop invitations, moderating the session, and inviting the media to participate. The workshop was presented by the Alameda-Contra Costa Weed Management Area which is a partnership between private and public land and watershed managers, including NRCS, local RCDs, staff from the County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, California Department of Food & Agriculture, East Bay Regional Park District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Contra Costa-Alameda Cattleman's Association, and Farm Bureaus from each county.



What may seem harmless in the early stage...



...will grow into the middle stage...



...and become toxic to horses and hard to get rid of in the late stage.

Two More Minutes!

By Dorothy Dowling, Soil Conservation Technician, Salinas Service Center

It's been said that time flies when you're having fun. So when the event guide walks around and yells, "Two more minutes," and you're not quite near completing your presentation on water quality in the watershed, you know the kids are having way too much fun pretending to be a rancher, farmer, or homeowner.

Farm Day events are a great opportunity to grab the attention of students (and sometimes parents) with topics such as pollution, natural resources, or conservation, and hold their attention for at least 20 minutes before the next group comes around. Invitations are usually sent to our RCD office so there is a lot of partnering on these events.



Anxious students were eager to "play" rainmaker, farmer, rancher or home owner.



Myself and RCD employee Julio Gil at the Farm Day Salinas with the EnviroScape watershed interactive unit.

The first Farm Day event of the fiscal year took place in Monterey. I partnered with **Tom Lockhart**, from the RCD of Monterey County, and used an earthworm demonstration. Approximately 375 third and fourth graders were anxious to watch, touch, and learn.

At the Farm Day event in Salinas, I worked with Public Affairs Specialist **Jolene Lau** and **Julio Gil** from the RCD of Monterey County. We used the interactive EnviroScape unit for that event and reached approximately 400 third and fourth graders.

The same interactive unit was used at the Farm Day event in King City, where resource conservationist **Danny Marquis** and I reached approximately 240 students.

Soil Tech not Rattled by Sleepy Serpent

By Jolene Lau, Public Affairs Specialist, Salinas Area Office

Thank goodness for observant eyes. Soil Conservation Technician **Bob Loveland** was on a recent field trip with his class in Malpaso Canyon in Carmel Highlands when he prevented a near rattlesnake misfortune. The field guide was pointing to a plant as part of his "Growing and Using California Native Plants" class when Bob calmly asked her to remove her hand from the plant.

"She was about five inches away from the resting rattler under the plant," stated Bob. The entire class was not aware of the snake's presence. Bob attends the Monterey Peninsula College once a week for the career enhancing class. Thanks for the safety measure Bob!

Caligrams...

\$2.12 million for RCDs in Governor's Budget

From CARCD's Conservation Express Newsletter

Good news from the Capitol! Governor **Gray Davis** signed the FY 2001 Budget for the State of California on Friday, June 30. This budget contains \$2.12 million for Resource Conservation Districts under the Department of Conservation's Watershed Grant Program.

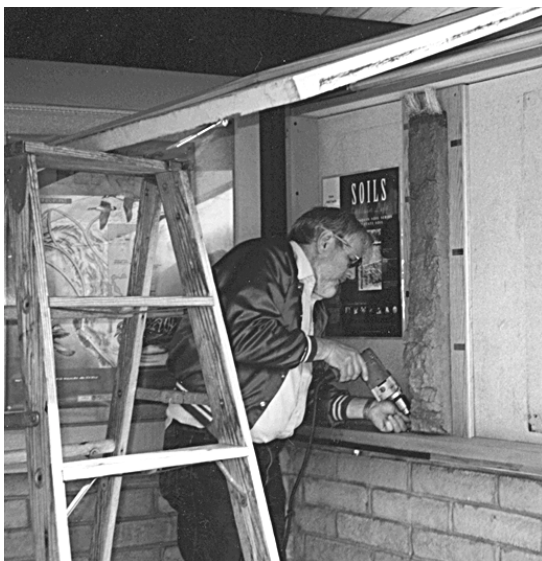
An expansion of the current \$120,000 program, this increase will provide an opportunity for districts to obtain much needed funding for watershed coordinators of projects such as streambank restoration, fuels reduction, and non-point source pollution reduction.

As approved, the two-year project provides funding for grants to be administered under Division 9 of the State Public Resources Code Administered by the Department of Conservation. The emphasis is on watershed activities at the local level.

The Department of Conservation will hold a series of workshops for RCDs in August to gather input on guidelines for the new grant program.

Travel Advisory: Soil Display Jamming Traffic on I-99

By John Rule, Soil Scientist, Madera Service Center



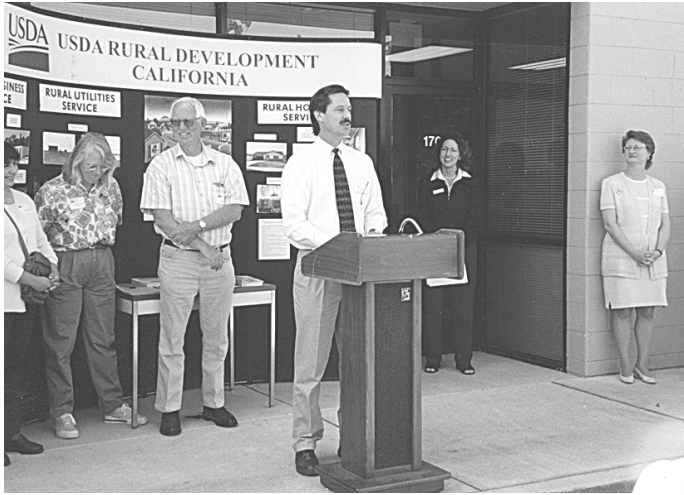
Warning! Whatever you do, avoid Turlock rest stops on Interstate 99. Ever since the all new soils display was installed, it's been one huge traffic jam. Word has spread like wildfire. Ask me why I'm not surprised.

For one thing, there's a colorfully informative poster, masterminded by **Torn Snyder** as part of his Senior project at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Right next to poster is one of retired NRCS Soil Scientist **Kim Chang's** monolith masterpieces, perfectly tailored to fit the display case. CalTrans Landscape Architect, **Jim Von Dohlen** (pictured left with drill) installed the display with my assistance.

Give the intense traffic a few years to die down. Then go see for yourself, if you don't believe me.

Elk Grove Service Center Celebrates Grand Opening

By Dave Sanden, Public Affairs Specialist, Davis State Office



On April 27, the USDA Service Center in Elk Grove celebrated its grand opening with distinguished speakers, displays, and an open house.

The event was hosted by NRCS, Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Rural Development (RD), and local Resource Conservation Districts. From 10 a.m.

to 2 p.m. guests had an opportunity to view agency exhibits, get acquainted with service center staff, and participate in hands-on demonstrations of new conservation planning technology.

Nearly 50 visitors gathered in the parking lot for opening remarks by agency officials. Among the speakers were NRCS Acting Deputy State Conservationist **Dave Smith** (shown above), District Conservationist **Surgit Toor** (shown right), FSA State Executive Director **Val Dolcini**, and RD State Director **Celeste Cantu**. More than 100 visitors toured the service center during the open house.

The Office is one of nine pilot sites for the USDA Service Center Initiative and features many “Business Process Reengineering” (BPR) projects, including a new Customer Service Tool kit that facilitates conservation planning for landowners, a mobile kiosk, and other demonstrations and exhibits. BPR is a management approach to improving service to USDA customers through fundamental rethinking and redesign of business processes.

The Elk Grove Service Center building is home to the offices of NRCS; FSA; RD; and the Sloughhouse, Florin, and Lower Consumnes Resource Conservation Districts.



Watershed Group Honored

By Dave Sanden, Public Affairs Specialist, Davis SO

On Monday, June 5, Team Leader **Tom Schott** accepted awards on behalf of the Russian River Watershed Group at the USDA Honor Awards ceremonies in Washington, DC.



Honor Awards were presented in two separate ceremonies by Secretary **Dan Glickman**, Deputy Secretary **Richard Rominger**, and NRCS Chief **Pearlie Reed** to celebrate exceptional efforts by the people of NRCS and its partners. The Russian River Watershed Group, a coalition of three Resource Conservation Districts and two Natural Resource Conservation Service Offices, was recognized for “*Outstanding Assistance to the Preservation and Enhancement of the Watershed.*”

Since 1994, through a variety of programs and grant sources, the Russian River Watershed Group has creatively worked to heal and protect the million-acre Russian River Watershed. “We have a lot of work ahead of us, but it’s nice to be recognized for all the work that’s been done,” says Schott.



Group Honorees include:

Tom Schott, District Conservationist (Ukiah); **Louise Hjelmring**, Soil Conservationist (Ukiah); **John Bennett**, Agricultural Engineer (Ukiah); **Carol Mandel**, Soil Conservationist (Ukiah); **Meg Strzelecki**, Medocino County RCD Secretary; **Mike Boer**, Medocino County RCD Director; **William Johnson**, Medocino County RCD President; **Craig Biencowe**, Medocino County RCD Director; **Chuck Crayne**, Medocino County RCD Director; **Steve Smith**, Medocino County RCD Director; **Charlette Sanders**, District Conservationist (Petaluma); **Jon Gustafson**, Soil Conservationist (Petaluma); **Chester Gin**, Soil Conservationist Technician (Petaluma); **Saljurga Bernardo**, Agricultural Engineer (Petaluma); **Robert Muelrath**, Sotoyome RCD President; **Ron Rolleri**, Sotoyome RCD Director; **Richard Mounts**, Sotoyome RCD Director; **Hally Swan**, Sotoyome RCD Director; **Dennis Murphy**, Sotoyome RCD Director; **Kerry Williams**, Sotoyome RCD Executive Director; **Warren Dutton, Jr.**, Gold Ridge RCD President; **John Black**, Gold Ridge RCD Director; **Bud Chenoweth**, Gold Ridge RCD Director; **Don Petersen**, Gold Ridge RCD Director; **Barry Fisher**, Gold Ridge RCD Director; and **Joe Pozzi**, Gold Ridge RCD Project Manager.

Carbon: A New Cash Crop?

By Dave Sanden, Public Affairs Specialist, Davis SO

The land has been good to John Farmswell. Over the years, his 4,200-acre farm has provided not only aesthetic and recreational enjoyment, but also a decent living through rich crop yields, timber harvests, and a small livestock operation. And John, in turn, has tried to be good to the land.

Although John used to farm conventionally, for many years now he has used conservation tillage practices and applied organic material to his soil. He has also established windbreaks and riparian buffers and maintains a wetland area that attracts waterfowl and other wildlife. Recently, John discovered that not only does his good land stewardship reduce his costs and improve the quality of his soil, water, and crops, it also helps clean the air. And John also discovered an unsuspected and yet profitable new crop—carbon.

At a local conservation workshop, John learned that conservation-cropping methods like “no-till” hold carbon beneath crop residue, where it serves as a nutrient, instead of in the air, where it is considered a pollutant. The resulting “carbon sequestration” improves air quality in a big way and produces measurable environmental improvements.

The bottom-line? All of that carbon in the ground earns John “carbon credits” that industries are eager to purchase. Some industrial carbon emissions are ruinously expensive to filter with air pollution controls but can be effectively offset by the work of John Farmswell. After decades of using good conservation practices, John was able to sell his carbon credits for \$24,570 (nearly \$6 per acre), representing 39,312 metric tons of carbon removed from the air. This was in addition to regular profits from his crops and livestock.

Although the above scenario is hypothetical, it could become a reality in the near future. According to recent research, the same farming practices that promote natural resources conservation can also decrease the accumulating carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, lessening the threat of global warming. Proposed legislation would provide financial incentives to farmers for conservation practices that remove carbon dioxide from the air and trap it in the soil. The concept of carbon credits and offsets that could be purchased by companies—even traded on the stock market—is also gaining momentum and support. Currently, soil experts

are evaluating the rates of carbon sequestration on agricultural lands and are developing a system to link conservation management systems to expected carbon sequestration rates in order to plan and certify soil carbon levels for individual farm operations.

Since the 1930's, agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA), have administered a broad range of conservation programs to assist farmers, ranchers, and other landowners conserve and improve soil and other natural resources. Conservation practices under these programs have great potential to increase carbon sequestration and decrease the emissions of greenhouse gases.

“Most of the conservation practices and systems that NRCS helps farmers and ranchers implement result in increased soil carbon sequestration,” says

Jeffrey Vonk, NRCS State Conservationist of California. “Erosion control through conservation tillage, residue and manure management, crop rotations, cover crops, vegetated buffers, windbreaks, and improved grazing land, all contribute to soil carbon sequestration while accomplishing water quality and sustainable resource management.”

“One of the ways farmers have already been conserving carbon is through USDA's Conservation Reserve Program,” says State Executive Director **Val Dolcini**, who heads the FSA in California. “When sensitive cropland is retired for 10-15 years under this program, carbon is retained. We estimate that nationwide about 10.4 million metric tons of carbon have been sequestered each year for the lands voluntarily placed in CRP.”

And cropland is not the only depository for carbon that could yield carbon credits. Vonk notes that restoring wetlands, grasslands, and forestlands also contributes to carbon sequestration, as each of these land cover types generally sequester more organic carbon than cultivated cropland. “Protecting wetlands and grasslands from conversion to cropland ensures that they continue to sequester carbon at higher rates than when cultivated,” says Vonk.

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Teamwork Key to State Envirothon Victory

By Michael House, Editorial Assistant, Davis SO

Civil Engineer **Mark Cocke**, Soil Scientists **Ken Oster** and **Kim Chang**, and Soil Conservationist Tech **Sharon Boyce** helped conduct the eighth annual California Envirothon at Walker Creek Ranch in Petaluma April 5-7 this year.

Thirty-one teams competed statewide to represent California at the National Envirothon, to be held from July 31 to August 6 at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. The winning team, Adolpho Camarillo High School's *Neem*, faced stiff competition from other members of their own high school, the Camarillo *K-Strategists* as well as Arlington High School's *Golden Lions*, who came in third and second, respectively. Last year, Camarillo High School placed fourth and 10th in the Envirothon, with only one student returning.

Participants were evaluated on environmental knowledge in forestry, wildlife, aquatics, wetlands management, and soils. On the last morning, teams prepared a final oral presentation on the current issue: wetlands management. This year's topic was *Assessing the Feasibility of Wetland Restoration on the Giacomini Ranch in Tomales Bay*, a comprehensive task which stretched everyone's abilities.

Cocke, in his fifth year as judge, noted that the overall quality of the entrants was the best yet. "The teachers are getting better at teaching about the environment, and the students are getting better at learning about it," he said.

The interagency sponsors look at the individual team event scores each year, studying the spread for clues to improve the event itself. "This year, the student study guides were completely revamped to coordinate with the education code," said **Brian Hockett**, Envirothon President and Pond-Shafter-Wasco RCD District Manager.

Helping *Neem* was **Alfred Ramos**, Soil Conservationist at the Somis Sevice Center. Ramos had no prior Envirothon background two years ago when he started coaching these students. The Ventura County RCD referred a call from **Chad Pridgen** of the Camarillo High School requesting that Ramos lecture their Advanced Placement Environmental Science and



Neem, the winning team, hails from Camarillo High School. Team members are (L to R) Pat Bocash, Margaret Hsieh, Becky Tittel, Erin Simon, and Spencer Wyman. AP Science teacher Chad Pridgen is on the right.

Chemistry class. "Two days after my talk they called me asking if they could go to the field!" Ramos said.

"Although most of the students do not have an agricultural background, they are motivated and enthusiastic," said Ramos. "Last year I gave them a wide exposure to environmental science. This year I decided to narrow my approach to expected soils, water quality and geology/plate tectonics. On their field trip the students examined road cuts to delineate horizons and searched for ground faults. This approach paid off with their first place win."

Pridgen also credits forester **John Kelly** and ecologists **Tom Keeney** and **Lynn Perry**, who organized a trip to the coastal wetlands at Port Mugu. *Neem's* oral presentation on wetlands clinched their first place win. "I actually had to winnow down thirty-some interested students to the two teams of five that are allowed to compete from any one school," Pridgen said. "Not only were the students who made the teams intelligent and highly dedicated, but they also possessed the intangibles in terms of maturity, teamwork, and charisma that are invaluable. I couldn't be more proud of the students; they met for an hour before school once or twice weekly throughout the year, and much more often as the competition approached, throwing in evening dinner/study sessions."

That was enough to send these proud students on a summer vacation to Nova Scotia.

California Hosts APIO Conference

By Jolene Lau, Public Affairs Specialist, Salinas Area Offices

State Conservationist **Jeff Vonk** generously supported the Asian Pacific Islander Organization (APIO) in hosting its second annual training conference in San Diego for one week in March. The help of countless committee members and supporters made this year's conference possible, and only positive comments have been expressed about the event.

The weeklong APIO training conference started with training for special emphasis program managers, followed by a session to prepare moderators with facilitation skills. USDA Under Secretary **Glenda Humiston** and Associate Chief **Danny Sells** welcomed all participants on the second day, along with Vonk and **Michael Yamaki**, who represents California Governor **Gray Davis**.

The many honored NRCS speakers included **Thomas Weber**, **Arun Basu**, **Doug McKalip**, **Colleen Schneider**, **Gerry Gonzalez**, **Scott Henney**, **Mon Yee**, and **Sharon Nance**. Conference participants also heard from president of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees, **Rebecca de la Torre**; president of the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees, **James Tatum**; and president of the National Organization of Professional Native American/Alaska Native NRCS Employees, **Richard Vigil**.

Many outstanding training opportunities were available. APIO proudly hosted workshops on *Common Computing Environment*, *Outreach and Community Involvement*, *Interpersonal Skills*, *Leadership Challenges*, *Legislative Affairs*, *Program Delivery to Traditionally Underserved Groups*, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and *Urban Conservation*. **Ron Peyton** and **Glenn Sakamoto** from Hawaii as well as **Pona Ala** and **Gibson Santos** of the Pacific Basin presented *Agriculture in the Islands*.

Other highlights of the conference included a conservation tour led by California's **Jason Jackson** and **Howard Mueller**. Both captivated the audience by sharing project successes in the San Diego area. Also, **Thu Hien Lam** moved people to gentle tears with her heartwarming story and portraits of Amerasian Children of War.

When there's a crowd, you know something's going on...Participants jam-packed a meeting room at 6:30 a.m. to hear from various women representing NRCS. The breakfast roundtable gave participants an opportunity to hear the experiences of:

- **Denise Doetzer**, Virginia State Conservationist
- **Fen Hunt**, National Research Coordinator
- **Joan Perry**, West Regional Conservationist
- **Jovita Pajarillo**, EPA Liaison
- **Judy Johnson**, Northern Plains Regional Conservationist
- **Lillian Woods**, Director of the Pacific Basin
- **Rebecca de la Torre**, SW Strategy Specialist
- **Sharon Nance**, Rural Sociologist

Over 100 NRCSers across the nation gathered for this event. And for all of those who remember Yamaki's statement about Asian Americans, "Stop sitting in the back of the room. Get on the floor and ask someone to dance." *E kala mai ia'u*, forgive me if I've left any names out and *mahalo nui*, much appreciation to all those who made this wonderful event possible.

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Of course, there are many details to be worked out—technically and politically. How will captured carbon be measured? Would this "crop" take decades to grow a marketable size? Will this incentive to farmers give a "green light" to would-be polluters? Like most innovative notions, there are more questions than there are answers right now.

Still, increasing the rates of sequestration and retention of carbon in soils could create a win-win situation for

agriculture and the environment. Carbon sequestration improves fertility and tilth, stabilizes soils against erosion and increases water-holding capacity. At the same time it could provide economic opportunity for farmers through payments for the value of carbon sequestered.

The good news for conservation-minded farmers is that they may soon earn extra profits for enhancing the type of work they have done all along.

Volunteers Make It Happen

By Ed Umbach, South Coast RC&D Coordinator

The '2000 Children's Drinking Water Festival' was presented by the Orange County Water District and Disneyland Resort on May 2 and 3 at Irvine's Wild Rivers Park. The South Coast RC&D was invited to bring the "Conservation on Wheels" mobile to the event and discuss pH soil and water testing. I was fortunate enough to have the help of volunteers to lead the activity.

As part of the Farming, Agriculture, and Resource Management for Sustainability (FARMS) Program, high school students and their teachers learn about the interrelationships between science, agriculture, and natural resource conservation through hands-on, real life experiences. Individuals pictured above right are in a second-year horticulture class at Capistrano High School and signed up as Earth Team volunteers to help teach third and fourth graders during the May fair.



*Danica Stender (L) stands by the South Coast RC&D's "Conservation on Wheels" with her Capistrano High School students **Lauren Dorow, Lacey Dorow, Susana Pantoja, Alandra Marquez, and Maria Barrera.***



The volunteers came early enough for me to walk through 'The pH Experience' with them.

These volunteers came to the event site while booths were being set up. I walked them through pH soil and water testing and provided examples of acidic or basic water and soil. Within minutes groups of students arrived and wondered what all the test tubes and eye droppers were for.

Not only did the volunteers present the material accurately, but they also showed enthusiasm for the topic. They had no problem keeping the attention of third and fourth graders. In fact, parents and teachers

got involved in the pH testing too. The participants thoroughly enjoyed watching the water change colors as they added vinegar or baking soda to the samples.

Over 50 other groups put up a booth with a variety of activities for local third and fourth grade classes to participate in. Other presenters included representatives from Orange County Water District, Truesdail Laboratories, Inc., California Department of Conservation, Irvine Ranch Water District, Blue Planet Foundation, Aquarium of the Pacific, Orange County Farm Bureau, Oak Canyon Nature Center, State Department of Water Resources, Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project, Discovery Science Center, Anaheim Fire Department, Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board, and Disneyland Resort Environmental Affairs.

A different group of Earth Team volunteers through the FARMS program from La Habra High School helped on May 2. That team consisted of teacher **Tony Miller, Kara Fazio, Bella Gomez, Katie Johnson, Brit Moritz, and Marissa Moritz.**

Thanks volunteers for a job well done!

PERSONNEL CHANGES

06/15/00

NAME	POSITION	ACTION	GRADE	LOCATION	DATE
Bischoff, M.	Admin Asst	Term-Exp of Appt	GS-05	Davis SO	4/28/00
Simpson, K.	Area Admin Mgr	Promotion	GS-08	Riverside AO	4/23/00
Anderson, W.	Range Conserv	Career Promotion	GS-09	Red Bluff FO	4/23/00
Cartier, E.	Outdoor Rec Plnr	New Hire	GS-11	Livemore FO	3/12/00
Palmer, E.	St Tr Soil Conserv	Promotion	GS-07	Davis SO	4/09/00
Almaraz, R.	Soil Scientist	Reassignment	GS-12	Lancaster	5/07/00
Huff, K.	St Tr Soil Con	Resignation	GS-05	Salinas	4/10/00
Preciado, J.	St Tr Engineer	Resignation	GS-04	Davis SO	4/18/00
Plazola, Y.	Admin Asst	Reassignment	GS-06	Davis SO	4/23/00
Porter, M.	Soil Conserv	Career Promotion	GS-11	Hanford	5/07/00
Barbosa, M.	St Tr Soil Cons	Resignation	GS-05	Fresno	5/03/00
Dreps, C.	Ag Engineer	Resignation	GS-09	Stockton	5/05/00
Figueroa, J.	St Tr Range	Promotion	GS-05	Templeton	6/04/00
Chavez, E.	St Tr Public Aff	Promotion	GS-03	Chico	5/07/00
Nelson, M.	St Tr Soil Cons	Promotion	GS-07	Modesto	6/04/00
Bundy, L.	Ag Engineer	New Hire	GS-09	Weaverville	4/23/00
Haydu, C.	Soil Sci	New Hire	GS-09	Apple Valley	3/26/00
Hernandez, G.	St Tr Engineer	Temp Hire	GS-04	Bakersfield	6/12/00
Briggs, L.	Comp Specialist	Resignation	GS-11	Escondido	6/05/00
Young, A.	Soil Cons	Resignation	GS-09	Half Moon Bay	6/09/00
Lake, P.	Soil Conserv	Career Promotion	GS-11	Yuba City	6/04/00

LETTERS

To **Gwen Gilbert:**

Thank you for the EXCELLENT article and photos about **Dorothea Lange** in the April Current Developments. The story was very well told and the layout was excellent. Everyone in NRCS has a connection to the effects of the depression and the dust bowl and I think that this story is very interesting. I had not heard it before. The reference list was helpful also. I am going to find these books and dig deeper into these pictures.

My Grandparents were among those who traveled to California (from Arkansas) by Model A pickup in 1936. There were six adults and three kids (including my Dad, age 9) and all their earthly possessions in the back, covered with canvas tarps like a covered wagon. They started out picking vegetables in the Chular area. Whenever I reread Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath I imagine what it must have looked like. But now I can see real pictures. I might even find my family in these photo collections. My Grandmother would have been about the age of the woman in the famous photograph. Well done!!!! Thank you!

– **David W. Howell**
State Soil Survey GIS Specialist

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

in California

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
430 G Street
Davis, California 95616

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